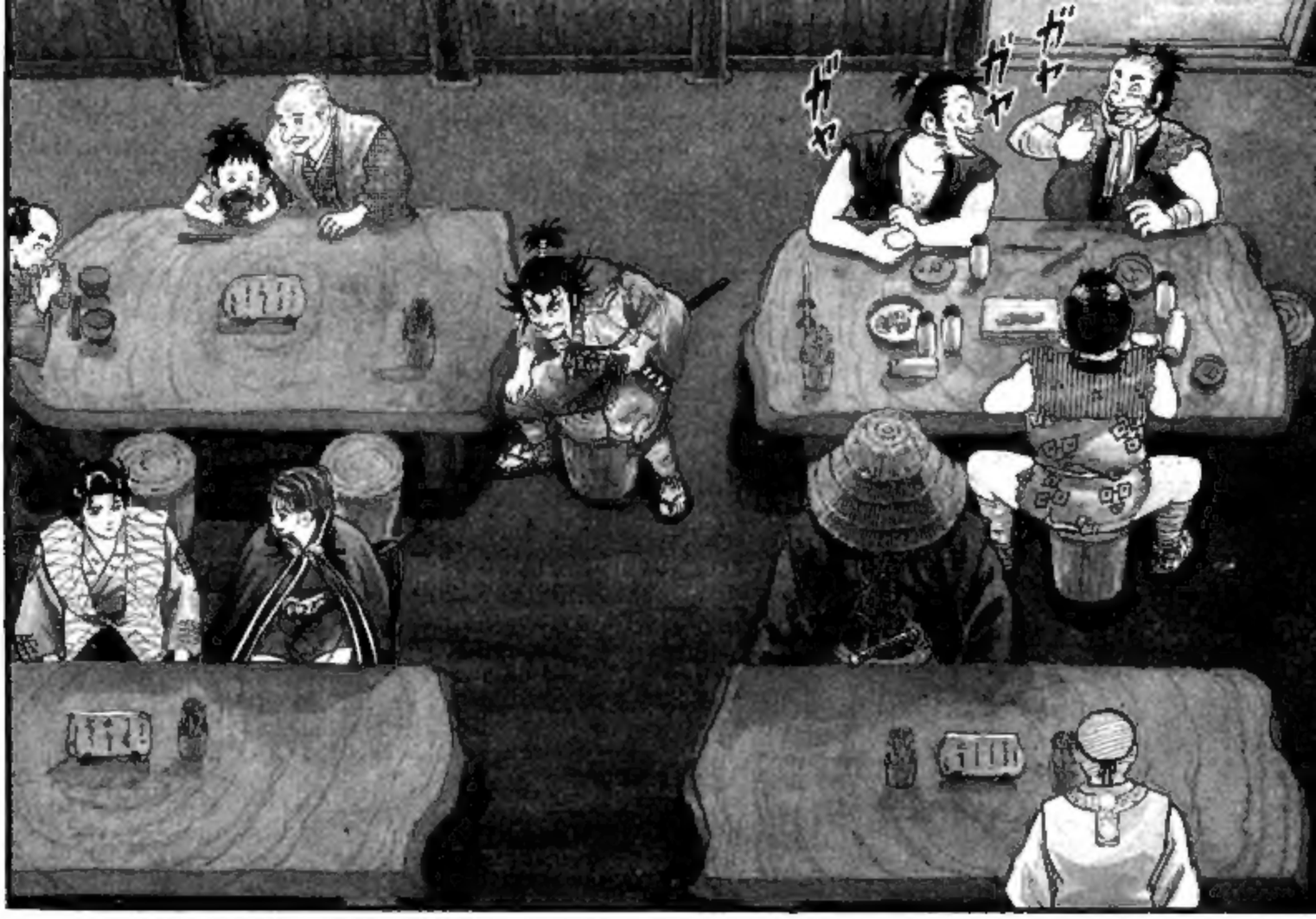
CHAPTER 2:
SHINOBI
HUNTING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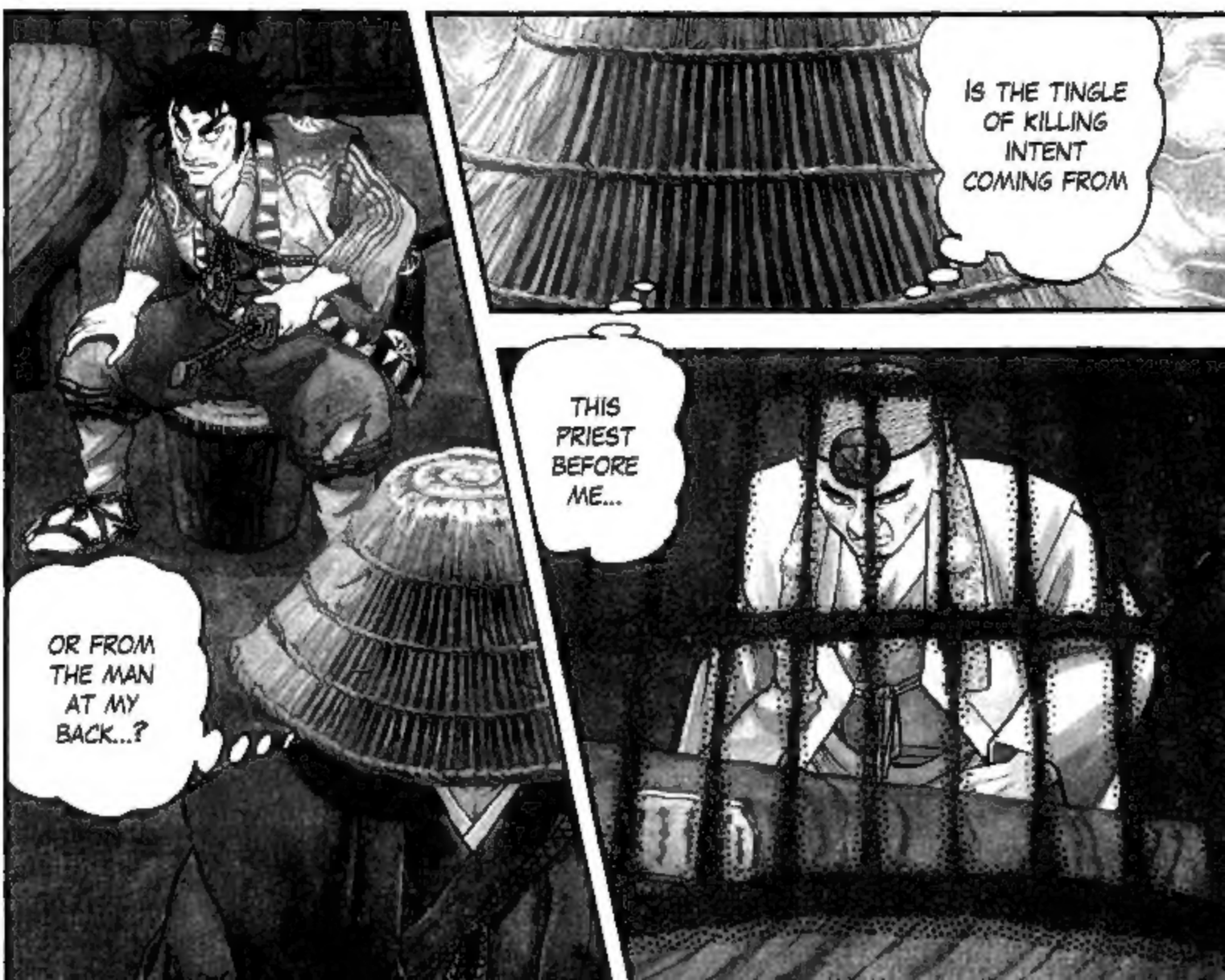
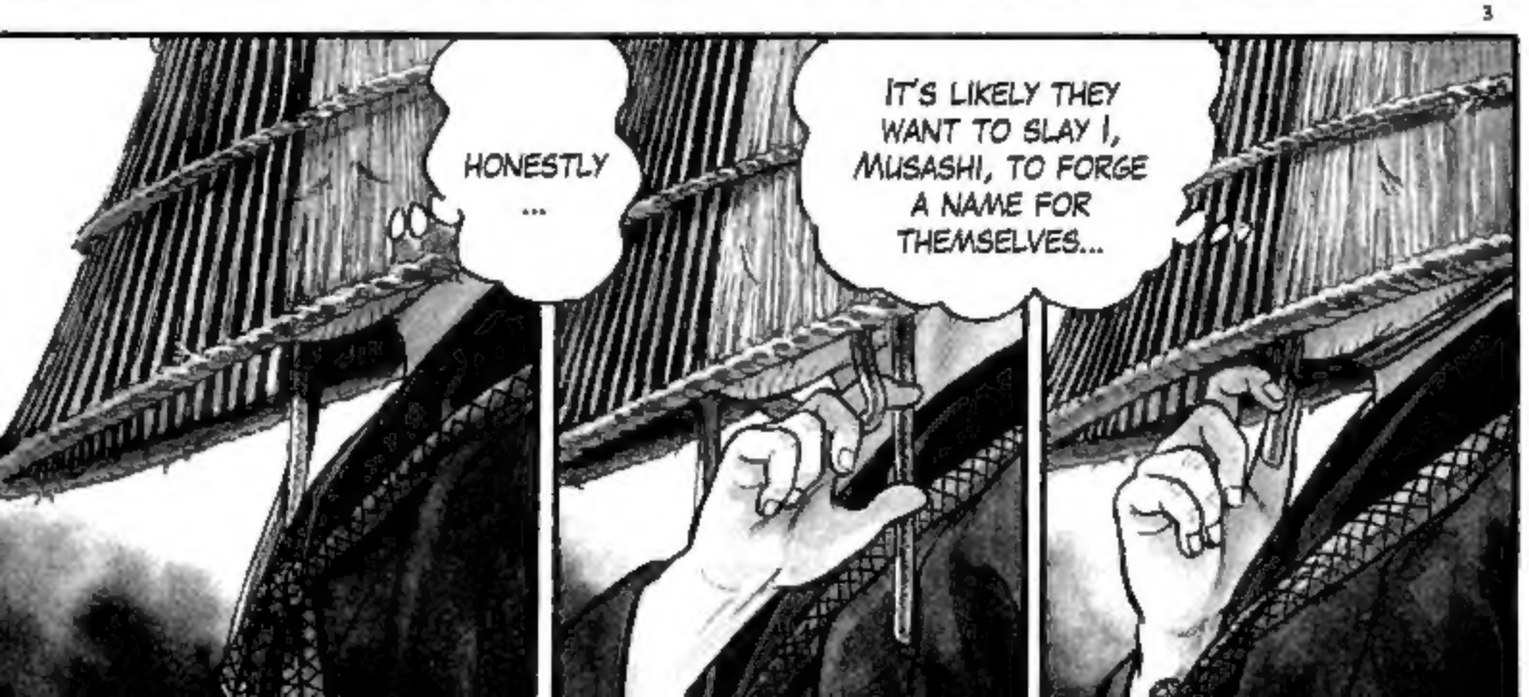

IS THE TINGLE OF KILLING INTENT COMING FROM
THIS PRIEST BEFORE ME...
OR FROM THE MAN AT MY BACK...?

THE YOUNG GIRL TO THE RIGHT...SHE WEARS A KATANA
BUT I SENSE NO KILLING INTENT FROM HER.
THE MOUN-TAIN PRIEST IN FRONT
AND THE MAN BEHIND ME...
ARE THESE TWO...PREPARING TO ATTEMPT TO KILL ME IN THIS PLACE?


HONESTLY ...
IT'S LIKELY THEY WANT TO SLAY I, MUSASHI, TO FORGE A NAME FOR THEMSELVES...

AZUMI HASN'T NOTICED ME... I'M SURE SHE HAS NO IDEA ABOUT ME!
NOW! NOW IS THE TIME TO KILL HER!
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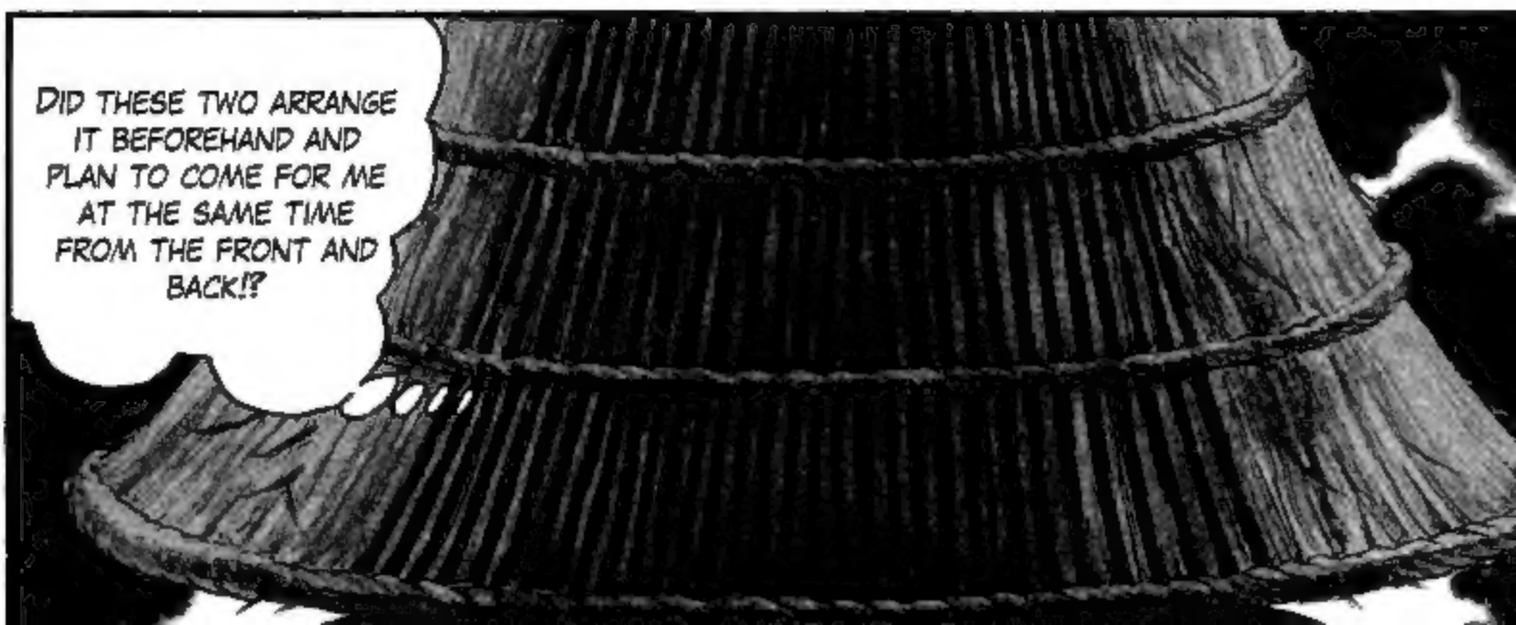
DID THESE TWO ARRANGE IT BEFOREHAND AND PLAN TO COME FOR ME AT THE SAME TIME FROM THE FRONT AND BACK!?

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I CAN KILL HIM!!... IF I MAKE A SURPRISE ATTACK FROM BEHIND,
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CAN DEFEAT MIYAMOTO MUSASHI!
NOW !!!

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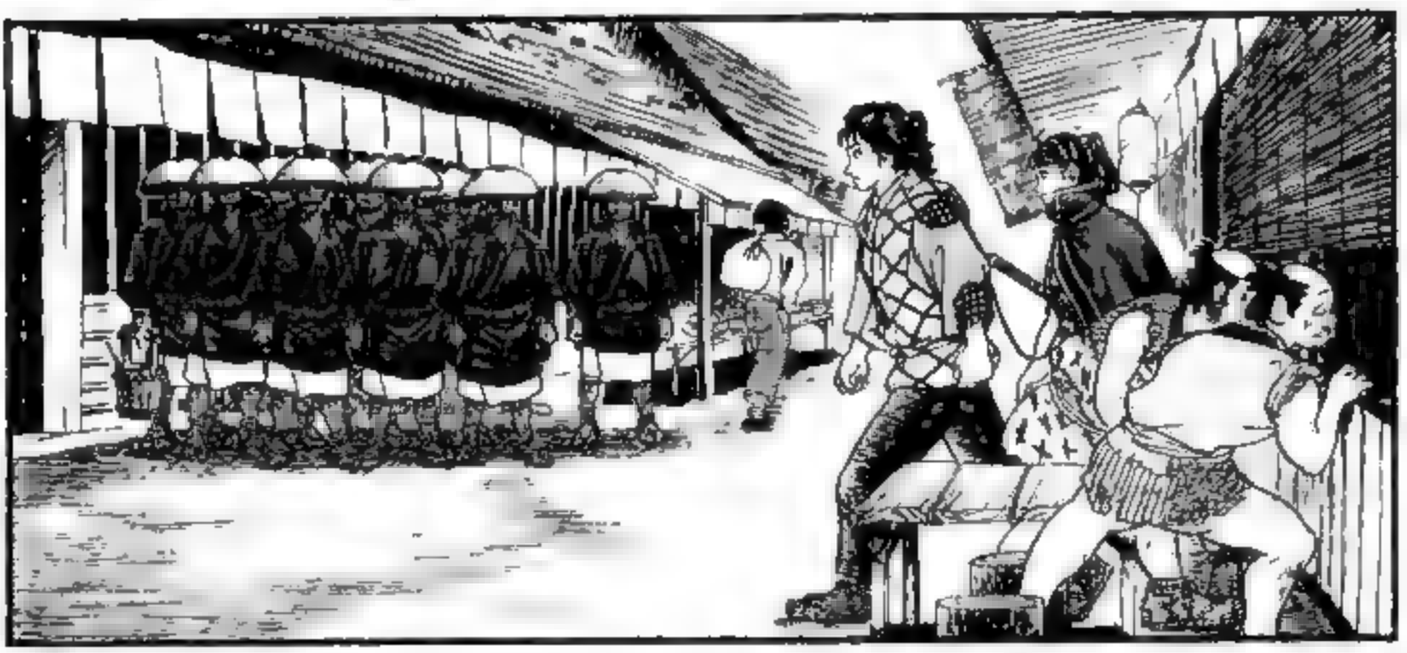

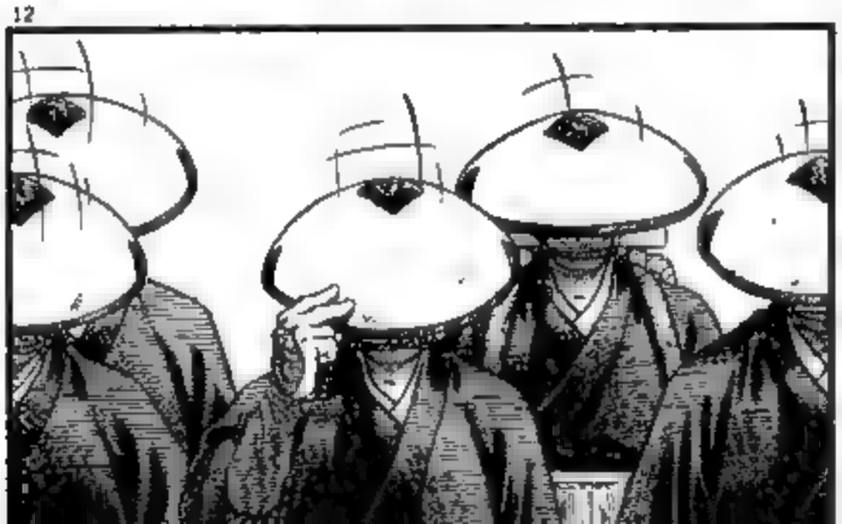

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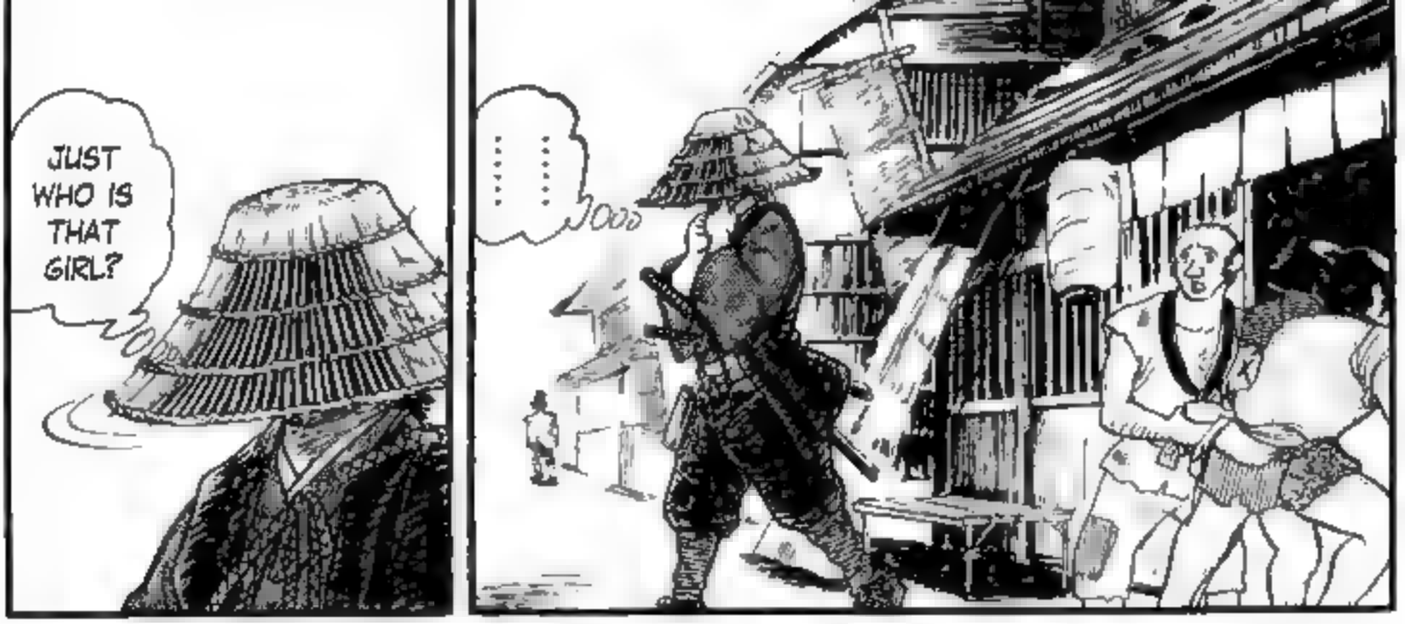
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?


JUST WHO IS THAT GIRL?
.....

YEAH
DID YOU KILL HIM?
.....

YOU CAN'T FOLLOW HER MOVEMENTS WITH THE NAKED EYE.
I WAS IN SHOCK ...
AND SHE ALREADY HAS... FACE LIKE NOTHING HAPPENED AT ALL...WHAT A WOMAN...

JUST WHO ON EARTH IS THAT YOUNG LADY?

WITH THESE EYES OF MINE...

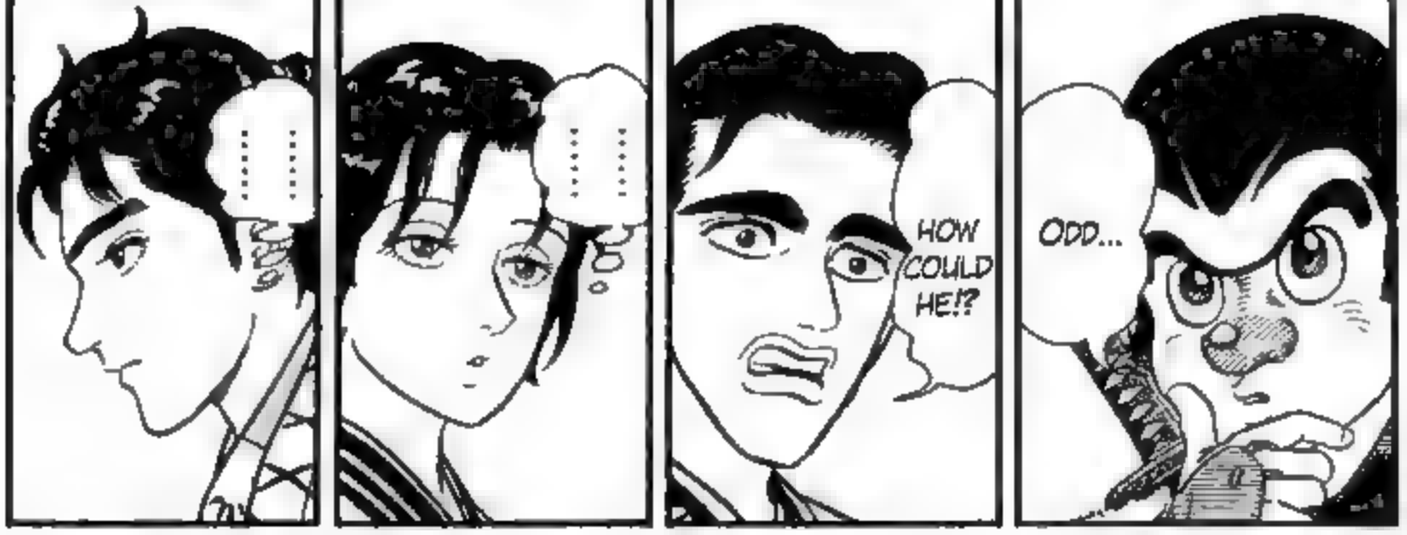
THERE'S NO DOUBT. I SAW IT!
BUT...
SUCH SPEED IS HARD TO BELIEVE.

THE MOUNTAIN PRIEST WAS AIMING AT THAT GIRL.
THE ONE TARGETTING ME WAS THE MAN BEHIND ME.
BUT THAT LITTLE GIRL...WITHOUT ANY KILLING INTENT WHATSOEVER...

I REMOVED MY HAT, JUMPED BACK AND DREW MY SWORD...
BUT THAT YOUNG GIRL, IN JUST AN INSTANT ...
WHEN DID SHE DRAW!? WHEN DID SHE JUMP!? WHAT QUICKNESS!! UNBELIEVABLE...

WHAT!? THAT GUY ATTACKED YOU FIRST!?
IT WAS THE FIRST TIME I SAW SOMEONE KILLED SO CLOSE...
YEAH.
I'M SO PATHETIC...MY LEGS ARE STILL SHAKING!

HE ALREADY SEEMED TO KNOW ME.
I COULD TELL HE WAS WATCHING ME.
BUT...HOW COULD THAT MAN HAVE KNOWN THAT I'M AN ASSASSIN?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HOW COULD HE!?
ODD...

IT'S VERY LIKELY THAT ONE OF THEM PASSED THE INFORMATION ONTO THAT MAN.
WHA-!?
EVEN AMONG THE CABINET OFFICIALS, THERE SHOULD BE ONLY A FEW WHO KNOW ABOUT THIS MISSION...THIS MEANS THAT...

ARE YOU SAYING THERE'S A TRAITOR AMONG THE CABINET OFFICIALS!?!?!

THEY COULD BE TARGETING US AS WE SPEAK!
IF THAT'S THE CASE, WE'RE IN TROUBLE!

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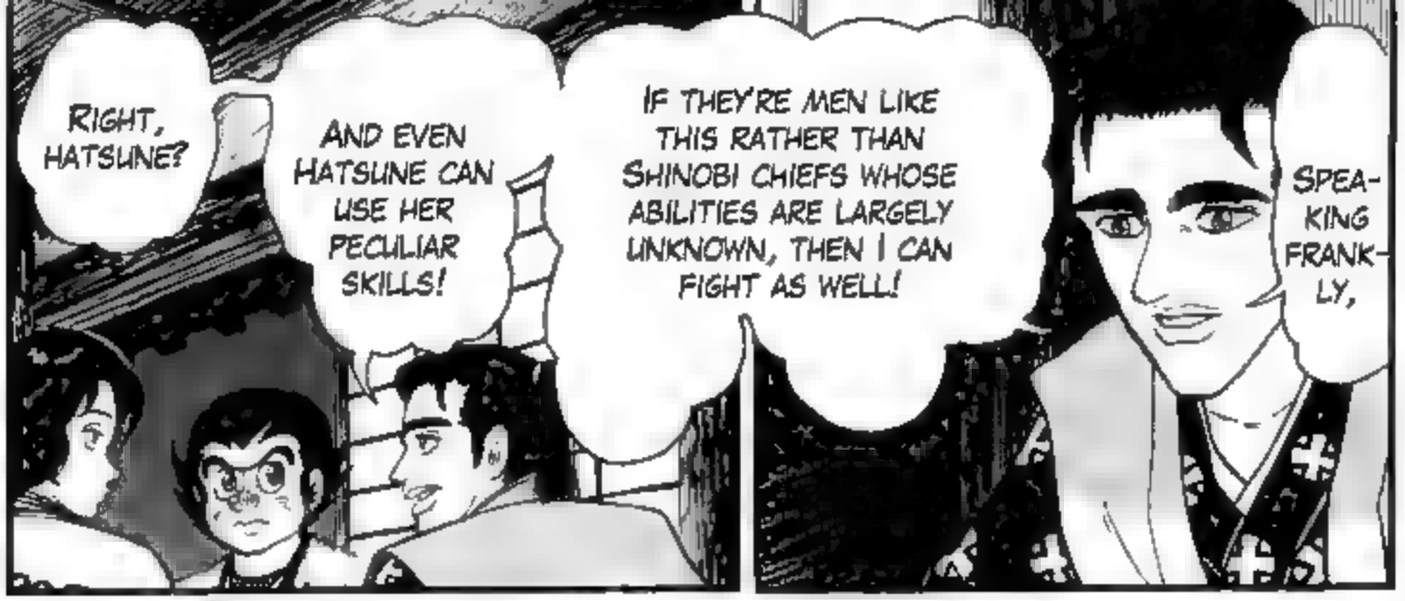
EVEN IF THEY KNOW US OR NOT, WE HAVE TO FIGURE THIS WILL BE A DIFFICULT BATTLE.
OUR TARGETS ARE UNLIKELY TO KNOW ABOUT OUR SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES.
LET'S TAKE CARE AND FACE THEM!

ABOUT THE...TWO MEN WHO WERE FORMERLY CHIEF RETAINERS. I'D LIKE YOU TO LEAVE THEM TO HATSUNE AND I.


SPEAKING FRANKLY,
IF THEY'RE MEN LIKE THIS RATHER THAN SHINOBI CHIEFS WHOSE ABILITIES ARE LARGELY UNKNOWN, THEN I CAN FIGHT AS WELL!
AND EVEN HATSUNE CAN USE HER PECULIAR SKILLS!
RIGHT, HATSUNE?

WELL...I WONDER ABOUT THAT!

.....
OKAY THEN!
THEN AZUMI AND I WILL HANDLE
THE REMAINING NINE SHINOBI CHIEFTAINS!

YOU HAVE TO CONSIDER THE PRESENCE OF SKILLED GUARDS HERE.
BUT GIVEN THEIR OLD POSITIONS, I CAN'T IMAGINE THEY'LL BE ALONE.

I'LL TRY KILLING HIM USING MY STYLE!
IT'S FINE IF WE JUST KILL THE TARGET, EH!?
THERE'S NO NEED FOR US TO TAKE ON ANY GUARDS!
LEAVE IT TO US!

RIGHT?

ANYWAYS, WE'LL FINISH OFF THE FORMER CHIEF RETAINERS!
YEP.

IT'S HIGHLY UNLIKELY THEY'LL RECOGNIZE US FROM MERE PORTRAITS, BUT WE'VE STILL GOTTA TAKE PRECAUTIONS!
YOU'RE RIGHT.
SO MAYBE IT WOULD BE BEST IF WE WERE DISGUSED AS WELL.
THE ENEMY ALREADY KNOWS ABOUT US.

BUT...I HAVE NO PLANS TO DISGUISE MYSELF.
YES.

IT'S LIKELY HOW HE SAW YOU.
AZUMI, YOU STAND OUT TOO MUCH IN THAT OUTFIT.

.....
THAT OUTFIT IS FAR TOO CONSPIC-UOUS!
HOW COME?
WHY!?
THOSE CLOTHES REALLY STAND OUT TOO MUCH!
BUT WHY!? I KNOW THAT IF YOU BECOME PUFFY LIKE YOU DID BACK THEN YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO FIGHT, BUT...
PLEASE JUST GO ON WITH YOUR OWN DISGUISES!
TRUST ME! I'LL BE FINE LIKE THIS!
WELL ...
WELL, I'LL BE!
I LIKE IT!
IT'S SOME-THING MY GRANDFATHER BOUGHT TO ME!
I LOVE THIS ONE.
.....

REALLY!
IT'S THE BEST ONE FOR ME TO FIGHT IN!

AND UNDER WHAT SCHOOL?
THAT YOUNG GIRL..WHAT SWORD-MASTER DID SHE STUDY UNDER?
HOW CAN SOMEONE WHO'S REACHED SUCH A LEVEL OF SKILL AT THAT YOUNG AGE EXIST!?

YOU...
I GET YOU, AZUMI...

AFTER ALL, OUR OPPONENTS ARE SKILLED WARRIORS WHO TAKE PRIDE IN THEIR BUJUTSU.
YOU WANT TO KNOW YOUR OPPONENT. TO FIGHT AND BEAT THEM IN A FAIR DUEL.
DON'T WANT TO ASSASSINATE SOMEONE WITH ONLY A SURPRISE ATTACK THAT YOUR OPPONENTS DON'T NOTICE.

YOU CHEEKY, PRESUMPTUOUS LITTLE GIRL!

WHEN YOU THROW AWAY YOUR PRIDE, YOU'RE NO LONGER A SWORDSMAN!
HEH, THAT'S ABSURD!
MAYBE THE FORM OF DEATH MAKES NO DIFFERENCE
IN THE END...

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THANKS, TOBI-ZARU.

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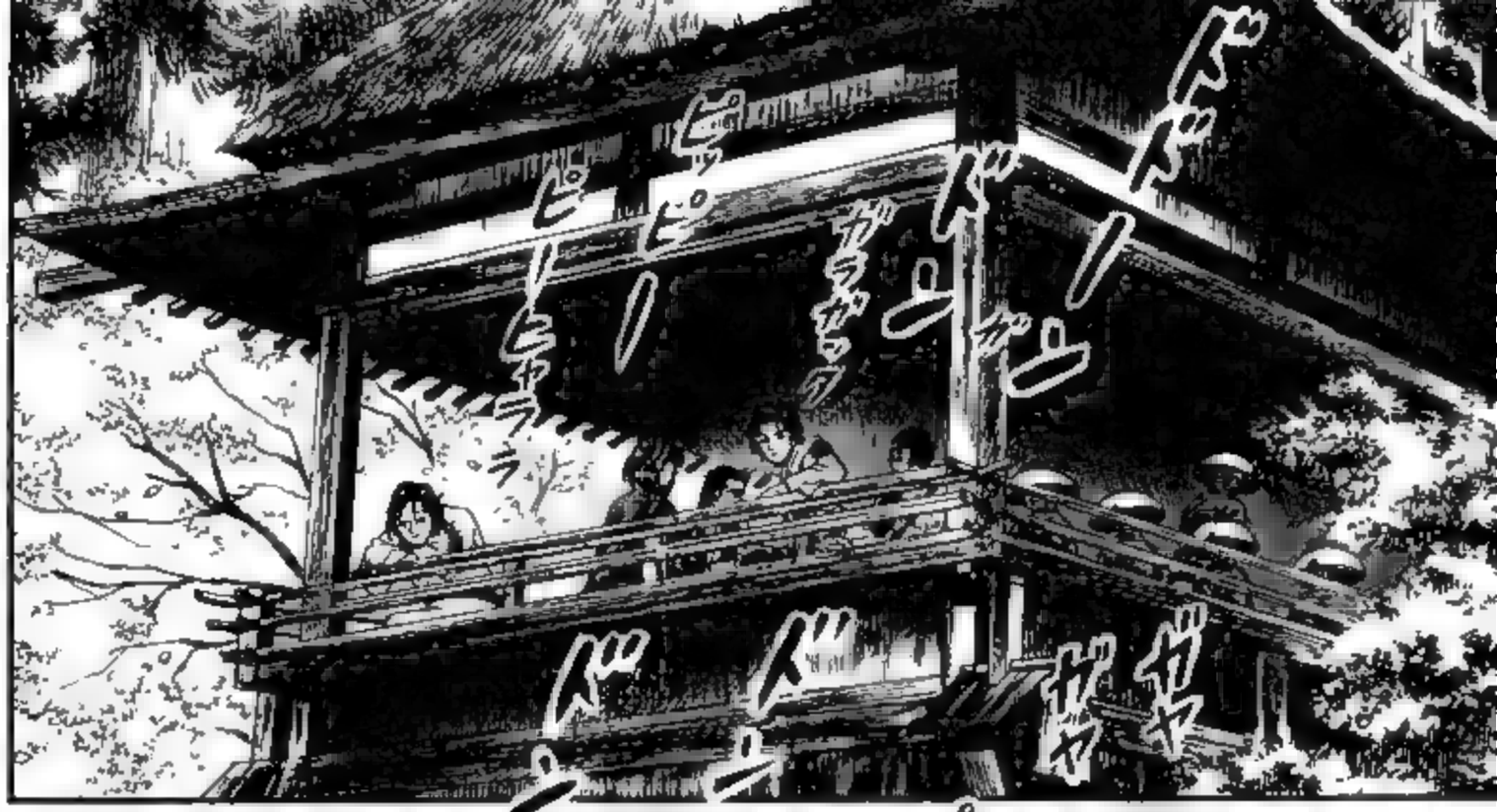
GOING TO THE FESTIVAL, YOU SAY?
DATE MASAMUNE HIMSELF ISN'T DUE TO ARRIVE YET,
BUT OTHER TARGETS MAY BE COMING.
THEY MAY BE MIXED IN WITH THE CROWDS FOR THE FESTIVAL.

NO MATTER THE DISGUISE, IF THEY'RE THERE, I WILL FIND THEM,
ISN'T THERE TOO MUCH CONFUSION!? CAN YOU FIND THEM AMONG ALL OF THOSE PEOPLE, HYOSUKE!?

LET'S BE OFF!
THOSE EYES OF YOURS!
THEY REALLY ARE SPECIAL!
OOH!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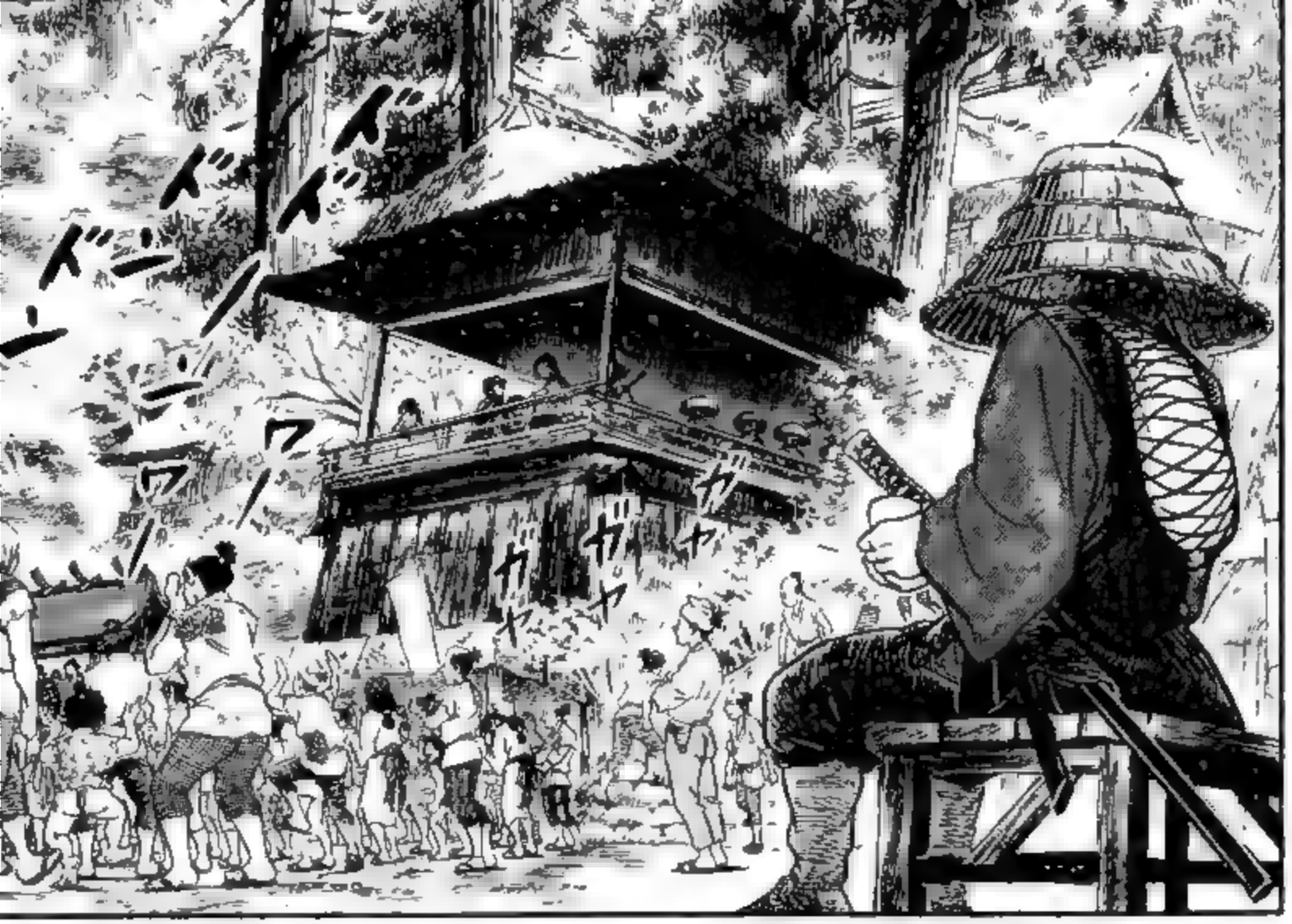
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WHERE? WHO IS IT?
FOUND HIM.

WHO IS IT? A SHINOBI OR A RETAINER?
SHINOBI. TAKAYAMA YAEMON.

HE'S THE MAN LEANING AGAINST THE BIG CEDAR TO THE SIDE OF THE STONE STAIRS.
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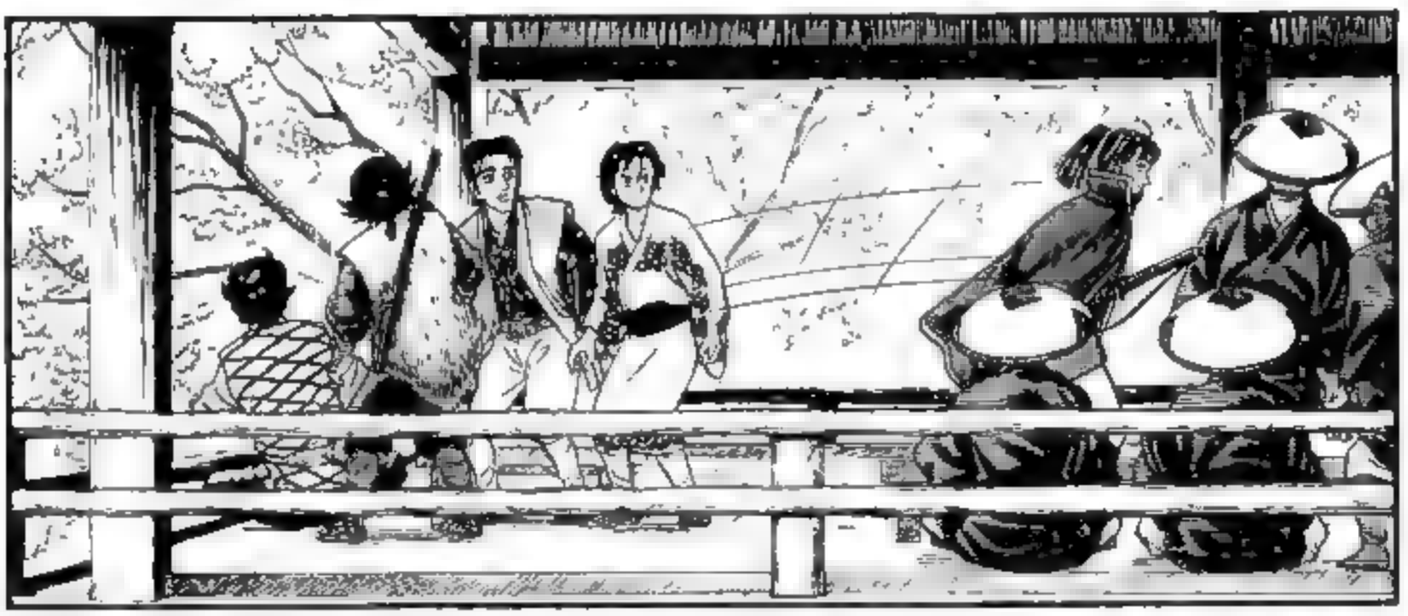

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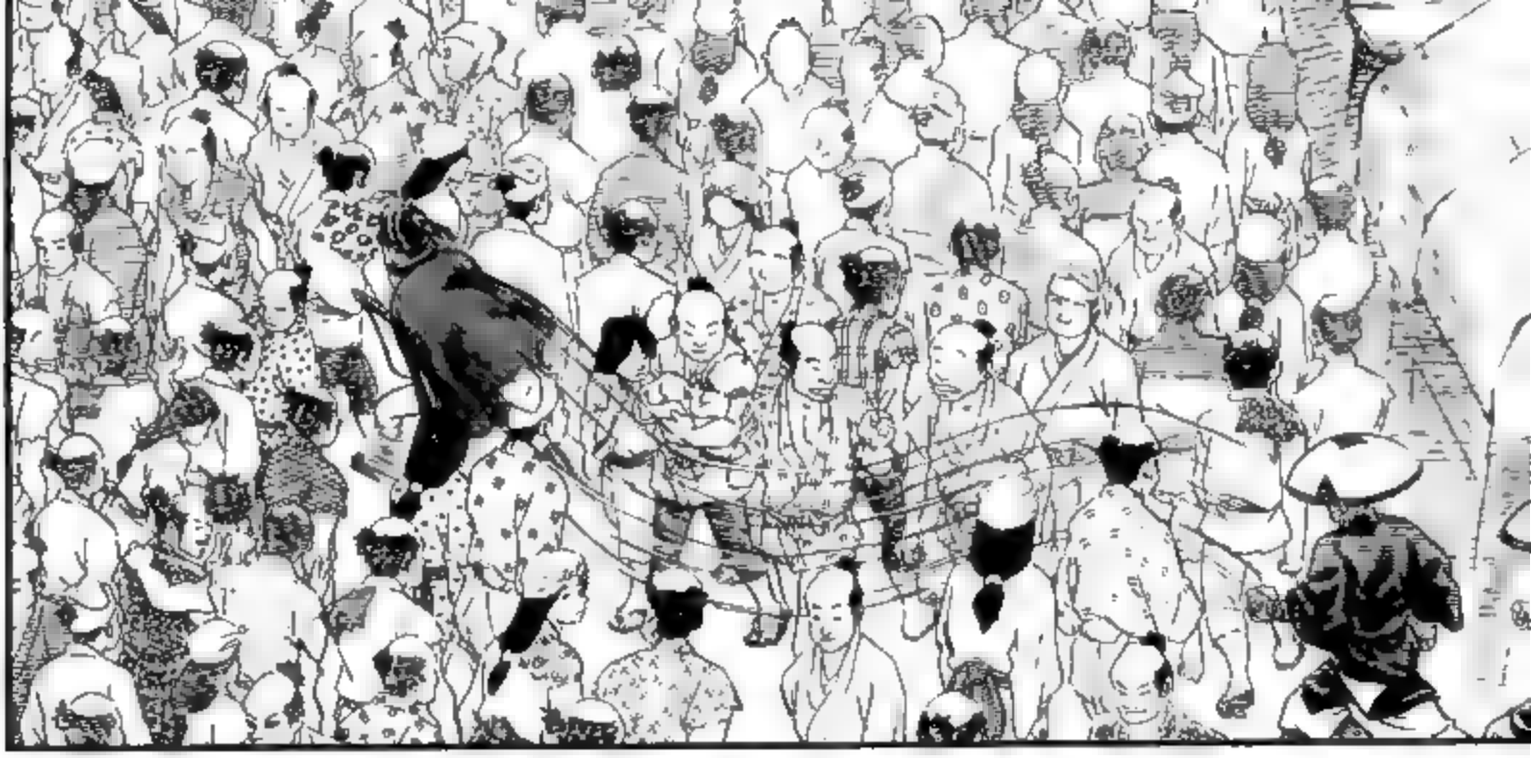
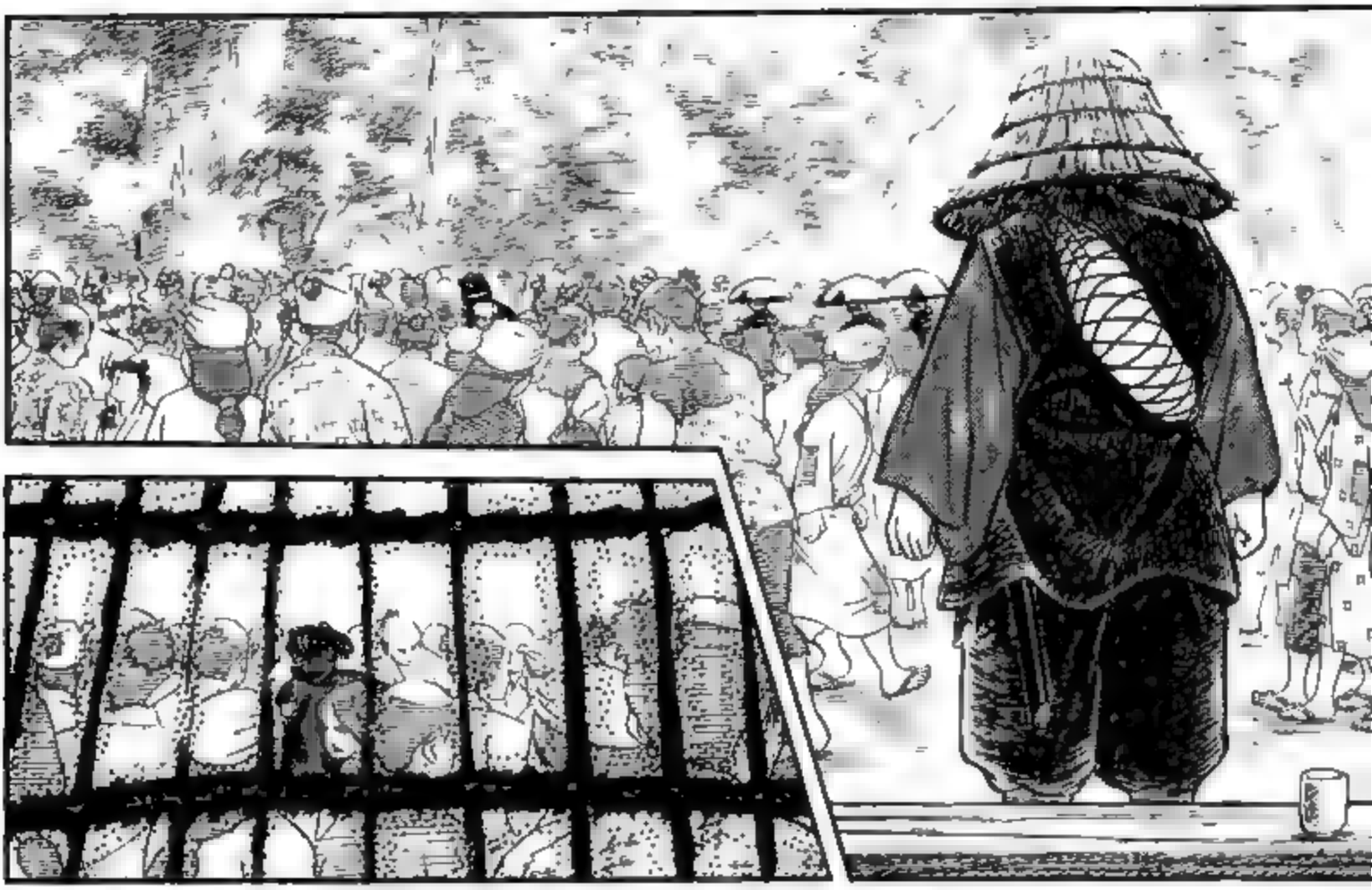
WHAT JUST HAPP-ENED ...?





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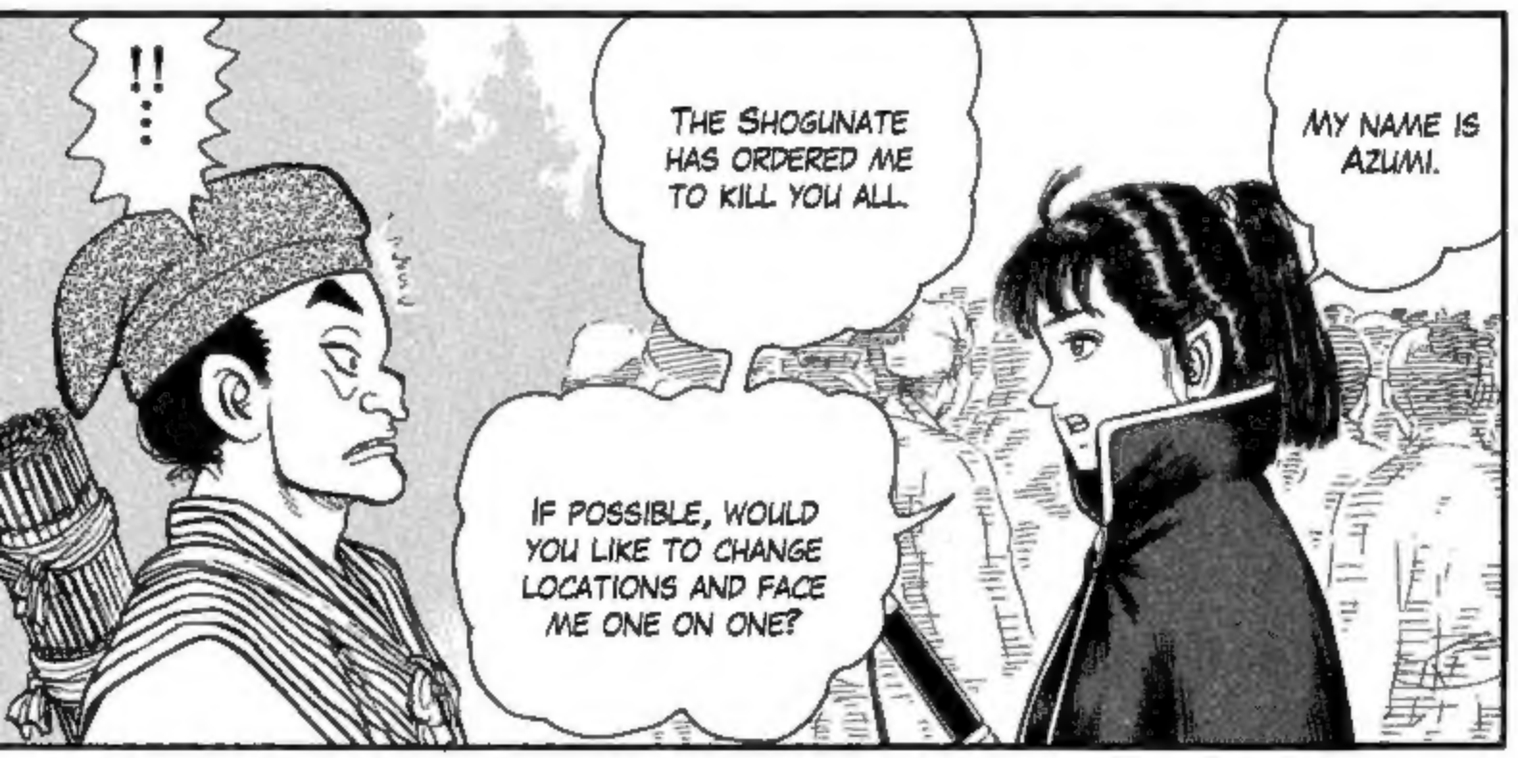
I SUPPOSE YOU ARE TAKAYAMA YAEMON-DONO.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THE SHOGUNATE HAS ORDERED ME TO KILL YOU ALL.
MY NAME IS AZUMI.
IF POSSIBLE, WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE LOCATIONS AND FACE ME ONE ON ONE?

.....

HOOHOO HOO... MY, OH MY...
GOODNESS... TO THINK THE ASSASSIN IS SUCH A YOUNG GIRL!
DIDN'T YOU RECEIVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT ME?

NO WAY.
I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT WAS A JOKE!
THAT A LITTLE GIRL LIKE YOU WOULD BE THE ONE TO TRY AND KILL ME!
SO THIS MAN KNEW NOTHING ...?